Every year, Charlotte Catholic students take part in the summer-abroad program offered through EF tours, visiting countries like Italy, Greece, Germany, Australia and New Zealand. But this summer, chemistry teacher Mrs. Belciglio wanted to explore the underappreciated state of Alaska.

Known as “the final frontier,” Alaska is most commonly associated with its boundless wildlife and endless adventures, many of the aspects that are advertised on fliers around the school featuring activities like kayaking, hiking, white water rafting as well as community service.

All of these adventures appealed to Mrs. Belciglio, who aimed to embark on the trip with a small group of students for the upcoming summer. Planning for the trip was challenging summer 2011 arriving quickly, the price for the trip was still not ideal. So in effort to allow more students the opportunity to participate at a more reasonable price, Mrs. Belciglio decided to postpone the trip until the summer of 2012 after a lot of aggressive fundraising.

“ Right now, we have raised $400 already, and with the additional fundraising next year, my goal is to get the cost down so that each person only has to pay $2,000. We already have fundraising ideas ready for the fall including football game concessions, a Krispy Kreme donut sale, a car wash, and even some events outside of school,” said Mrs. Belciglio.

"I'd be lying if I didn't say I was a little bummed that the date was pushed so far back, but I understand that fundraising is key. Regardless, I am absolutely stoked for such a fine opportunity to see the rest of my country and do some good in the community,” said one junior that prefers to remain anonymous.

Community service is another unique feature offered on the trip. Mrs. Belciglio and M.J. of campus ministry worked together to contact local Catholic ministries in Alaska to work with during their stay. In the days dedicated to service, students will help construct facilities, a project much like Habitat for Humanity.

The idea to travel to Alaska originally was inspired by Mrs. Belciglio’s father who always spoke of its incomparable beauty. “Though he visited places around the globe throughout his lifetime, Alaska was by far his favorite,” said Mrs. Belciglio.

She also said, “Most of the school trips are outside the U.S. to various different places, but I wanted students to be able to explore all that the U.S. has to offer, to experience the beauty, and have a chance to observe different cultures.”

With the itinerary packed with endless outdoor activities and explorations, there won’t be a dull moment. The actual trip is hosted by the group Grand Classrooms that hosts numerous educational and adventure travel trips. The program coordinators also lead the tours and excursions, especially the main group leader Lauren Neese who will have just completed a marathon before meeting Catholic students in Alaska.

With excitement and determination, Mrs. Belciglio and numerous students prepare for an aggressive year of fundraising, anxiously counting down the days until they can encounter “the last frontier.”